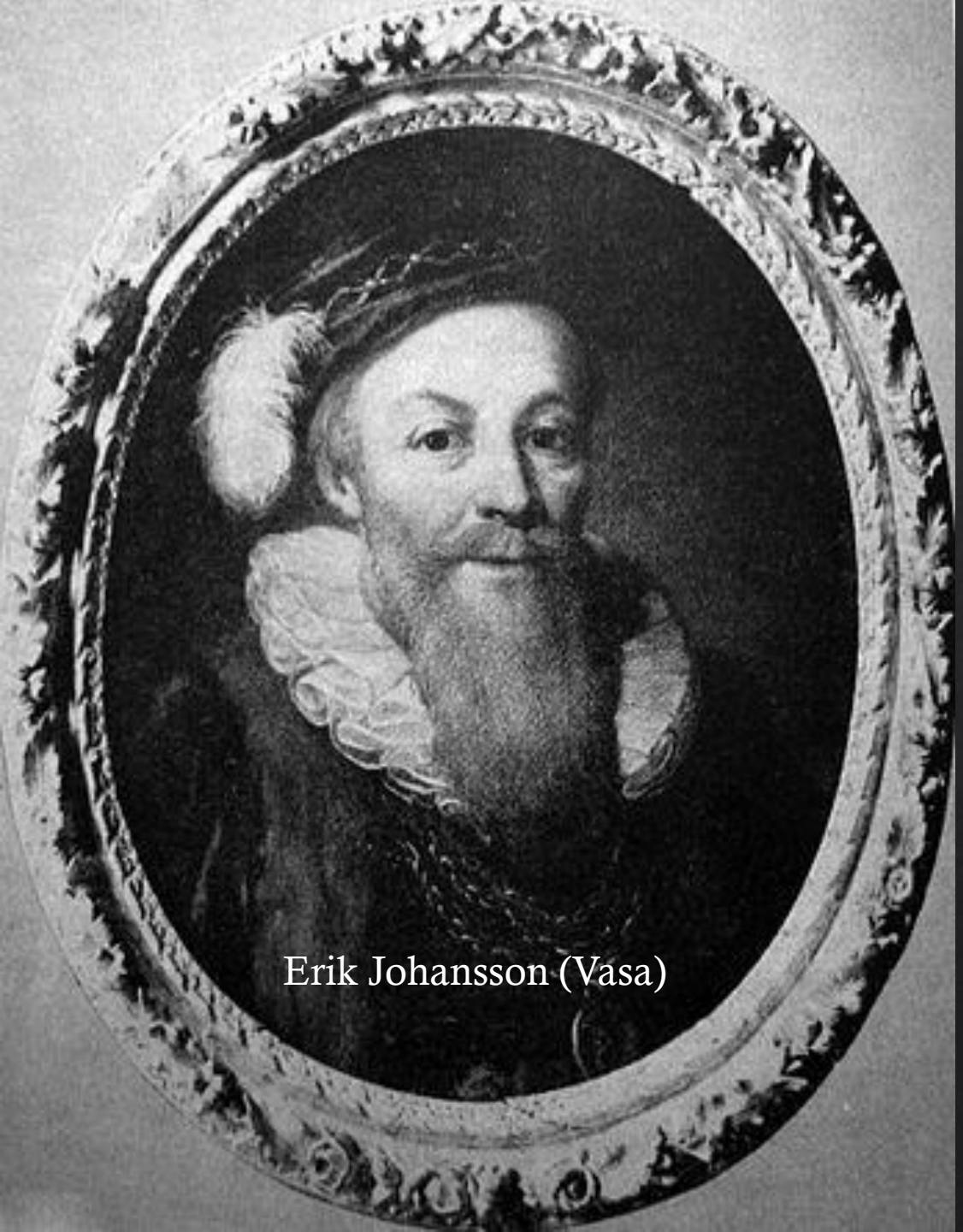
Gustav I Vasa

From Gustav 1 to Charles XII

Gustav Vasa

Gustav Eriksson of the Vasa noble family and later known as Gustav Vasa (12 May 1496 – 29 September 1560), was King of Sweden from 1523 until his death in 1560, previously self-recognised Protector of the Realm (Riksföreståndare) from 1521, during the ongoing Swedish War of Liberation against King Christian II of Denmark, Norway and Sweden

Gustav Vasa and King Hans



Erik Johansson (Vasa)

Cecilia Månsdotter (Eka)

Gustav Eriksson, a son of Cecilia Månsdotter Eka and Erik Johansson Vasa, was probably born in 1496. The birth most likely took place in Rydboholm Castle, northeast of Stockholm, the manor house of the father, Erik. The newborn got his name, Gustav, from Erik's grandfather Gustav Anundsson.

Erik Johansson's parents were Johan Kristersson and Birgitta Gustafsdotter of the dynasties Vasa and Sture respectively, both dynasties of high nobility. Birgitta Gustafsdotter was the sister of Sten Sture the Elder, regent of Sweden. Being a relative and ally of uncle Sten Sture, Erik inherited the regent's estates in Uppland and Södermanland when the latter died in 1503. Although a member of a family with considerable properties since childhood, Gustav Eriksson would later be the holder of possessions of a much greater dimension.

executed in the Stockholm Bloodbath in November of that year. Among those executed was Erik Johansson Vasa on 8 November 1520.

Spouses

Spouse Catherine of Saxe-Lauenburg

Margaret Leijonhufvud

Catherine Stenbock

Katarina av Sachsen-Lauenburg

Margareta Eriksdotter (Leijonhufvud)

Katarina Gustavsdotter (Stenbock)

Katarina av Sachsen-Lauenburg

Margareta Eriksdotter (Leijonhufvud)

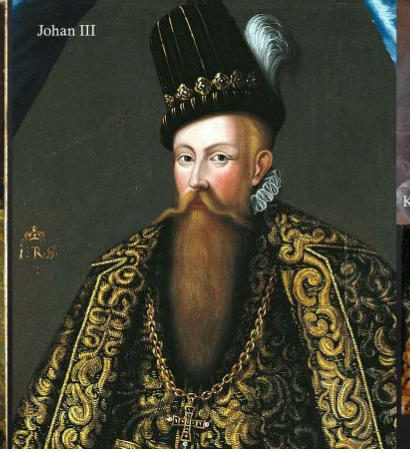
Katarina Gustavsdotter (Stenbock)

Born 12 May 1496

Rydboholm Castle, Uppland or
Lindholmen, Uppland, Sweden

Died 29 September 1560 (aged 64)
Tre Kronor, Stockholm, Sweden

Burial 21 December 1560
Uppsala Cathedral, Uppsala, Sweden



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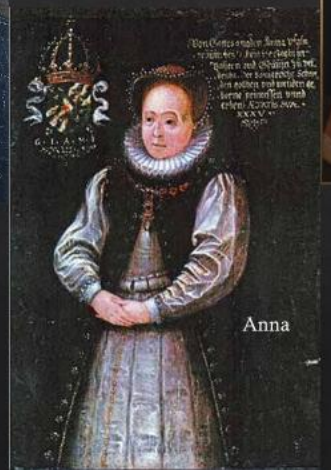
Karl



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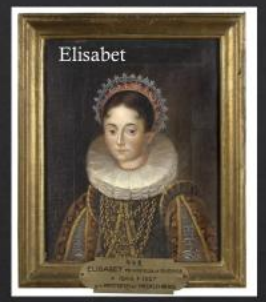
Sten



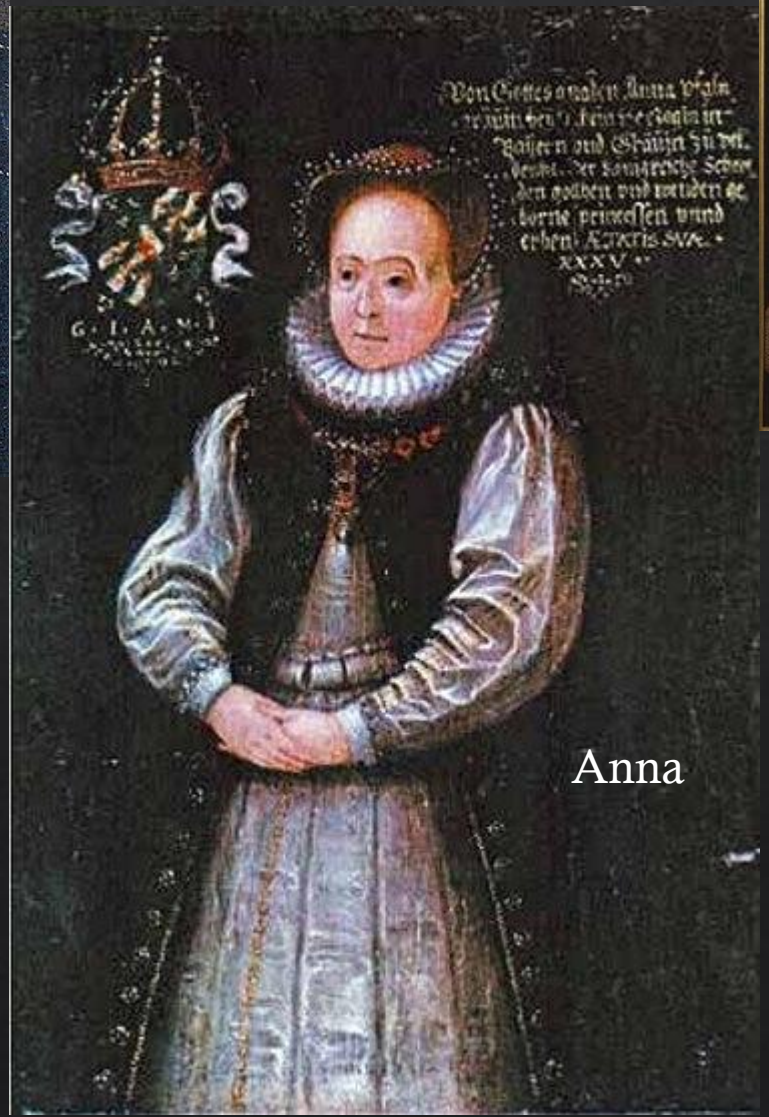
Eric XIV of Sweden
John III of Sweden
Katharina Vasa
Cecilia, Margravine of Baden-Rodemachern
Magnus, Duke of Östergötland
Anna, Countess Palatine of Veldenz
Sophia, Duchess of Saxe-Lauenburg
Elizabeth, Duchess of Mecklenburg-Gadebusch
Charles IX of Sweden
Karl
Sten

Children

Cecilia

X

Karl



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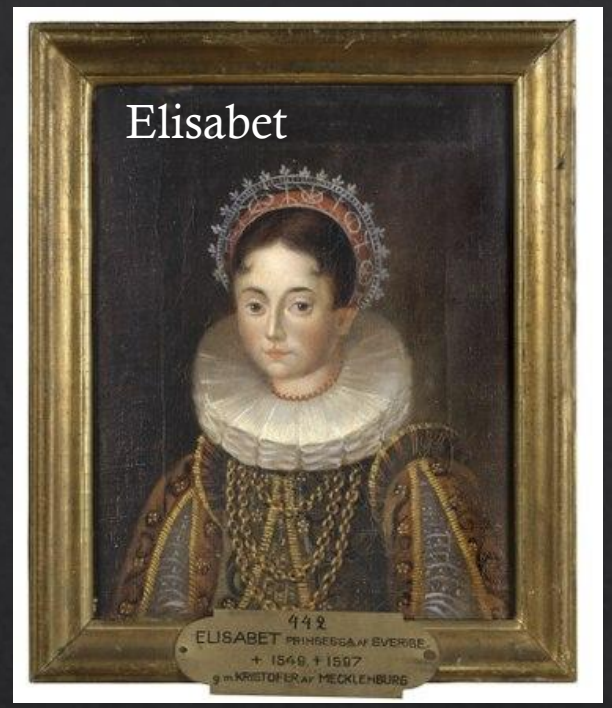
Sten



Karl IX

Gustav rose to lead the rebel movement following the Stockholm Bloodbath, in which his father perished. Gustav's election as King on 6 June 1523 and his triumphant entry into Stockholm eleven days later marked Sweden's final secession from the Kalmar Union.

As king, Gustav proved an enigmatic administrator with a ruthless streak not inferior to his predecessor's, brutally suppressing subsequent uprisings (three in Dalarna – which had once been the first region to support his claim to the throne – one in Västergötland, and one in Småland). He worked to raise taxes and bring about a Reformation in Sweden, replacing the prerogatives of local landowners, noblemen and clergy with centrally appointed governors and bishops.

He became the first truly autocratic native Swedish sovereign and was a skilled bureaucrat and propagandist, with tales of his largely fictitious adventures during the liberation struggle still widespread to date. In 1544, he abolished Medieval Sweden's elective monarchy and replaced it with a hereditary monarchy under the House of Vasa and its successors, including the current House of Bernadotte. Thus, three of his sons, Eric XIV, John III and Charles IX, all held the kingship at different points

Compare himself to Moses, whom he believed to have also liberated his people and established a sovereign state. As a person, Gustav was known for ruthless methods and a bad temper, but also a fondness for music and had a certain sly wit and ability to outmaneuver and annihilate his opponents

Resistance against the Danish

Since the end of the 14th century, Sweden had been a part of the Kalmar Union with Denmark and Norway. The Danish dominance in this union occasionally led to uprisings in Sweden. During Gustav's childhood, parts of the Swedish nobility tried to make Sweden independent. Gustav and his father Erik supported the party of Sten Sture the Younger, regent of Sweden from 1512, and its struggle against the Danish King Christian II. Following the battle of Brännkyrka in 1518, where Sten Sture's troops beat the Danish forces, it was decided that Sten Sture and King Christian would meet in Österhaninge for negotiations.

To guarantee the safety of the king, the Swedish side sent six men as hostages to be kept by the Danes for as long as the negotiations lasted. However, Christian did not show up for the negotiations, violated the deal with the Swedish side and took the hostages aboard ships carrying them to Copenhagen. The six members of the kidnapped hostage were Hemming Gadh, Lars Siggesson (Sparre), Jöran Siggesson (Sparre), Olof Ryning, Bengt Nilsson (Färla) – and Gustav Eriksson.

In 1519, Gustav Eriksson escaped from Kalø. He fled to the Hanseatic city of Lübeck where he arrived on 30 September. How he managed to escape is not certain, but according to a somewhat likely story, he disguised himself as a bullocky. For this, Gustav Eriksson got the nicknames "King Oxtail" and "Gustav Cow Butt", something he indeed disliked. When a swordsman drank to His Majesty "Gustav Cow Butt" in Kalmar in 1547, the swordsman was killed.

In Dalarna

Gustav Eriksson had reasons to fear for his life and left Räfsnäs. He travelled to the province of Dalarna, in what was then northwestern Sweden. What happened there has been described in Peder Svart's chronicle, which can be described as a strongly biased heroic tale about Gustav Eriksson. The Dalarna adventures of Gustav that could be described as a part of the national heritage of Sweden, can therefore not be verified in a satisfying way.

Being chased by men loyal to king Christian and failing at creating an army to challenge the king, Gustav Eriksson had no other alternative but to flee to Norway. While he made his way from Mora via Lima to Norway, people that had recently turned down Gustav's call for support against the king changed their minds. Representatives of that group caught up with Gustav before he had reached Norway and convinced him to follow them back to Mora.

Gustav Eriksson's run towards Norway and back has formed the background to the famous cross-country ski race Vasaloppet.

Gustav Eriksson addressing men from Dalarna in Mora. Painting by Johan Gustaf Sandberg.

Swedish War of Liberation

Gustav Eriksson was appointed hövitsman. The rebel force he led grew. In February 1520 it consisted of 400 men, mainly from the area around Lake Siljan. The first big clash in the Dissolution of Kalmar Union that now started, took place at Brunnbäck's Ferry in April, where a rebel army defeated an army loyal to the king. The sacking of the city of Västerås and with it controlling important copper and silver mines gave Gustav Vasa resources and supporters flocked to him.

The leading noblemen of Götaland joined Gustav Eriksson's forces and, in Vadstena in August, they declared Gustav regent of Sweden.

The election of Gustav Eriksson as a regent made many Swedish nobles, who had so far stayed loyal to King Christian, switch sides. Some noblemen, still loyal to the king, chose to leave Sweden, while others were killed. As a result, the Swedish Privy Council lost old members who were replaced by supporters of Gustav Eriksson. Most fortified cities and castles were conquered by Gustav's rebels, but the strongholds with the best defences, including Stockholm, were still under Danish control.

In 1522, after negotiations between Gustav Eriksson's people and Lübeck, the Hanseatic city joined the war against Denmark. The winter of 1523 saw the joint forces attack the Danish and Norwegian areas of Scania, Halland, Blekinge and Bohuslän. During this winter, Christian II was overthrown and replaced by Frederick I. The new king openly claimed the Swedish throne and had hopes Lübeck would abandon the Swedish rebels. The German city, preferring an independent Sweden to a strong Kalmar Union dominated by Denmark, took advantage of the situation and put pressure on the rebels. The city wanted privileges on future trade as well as guarantees regarding the loans they had granted the rebels. The Privy Council and Gustav Eriksson knew the support from Lübeck was absolutely crucial. As a response, the council decided to appoint Gustav Eriksson king.

Election as king

The ceremonial election of the regent Gustav Eriksson as king of Sweden took place when the leading men of Sweden got together in Strängnäs in June 1523. When the councillors of Sweden had chosen Gustav as king, he met with the two visiting councillors of Lübeck. The German representatives supported the appointment without hesitation and declared it an act of God. Gustav stated he had to bow to what was described as the will of God.

The capture of Stockholm

Shortly after the events of 1523 in Strängnäs, letters patent were issued to Lübeck and its allied Hanseatic cities, who now were freed from tolls when trading in Sweden. An agreement, designed by Lübeck negotiators, was made with the Danish defenders in Stockholm. On 17 June the rebels could enter the capital city. At Midsummer, a grand entrance of king Gustav was arranged at Söderport, the southern gate of Stockholm. Celebrations followed, including a mass of thanksgiving in Storkyrkan (also known as Stockholm Cathedral) led by Peder Jakobsson. Gustav could now install himself in the Tre Kronor palace.

The war ends

Bailiffs, loyal to the old king Christian, were still holding castles in Finland, a part of Sweden at the time. During the summer and fall of 1523 they all surrendered. The next year, on 24 August 1524, Gustav arrived in Malmö in order to reach a settlement with Denmark and its king Frederick. The Treaty of Malmö (in Swedish: Malmö recess) had both positive and negative sides to it, from king Gustav's perspective. The treaty meant that Denmark-Norway acknowledged the independence of Sweden. The hopes Gustav had carried of winning further provinces (Gotland and Blekinge) were however scuttled. The treaty marked the end of the Swedish War of Liberation.

The Reformation

After Gustav seized power, the previous Archbishop, Gustav Trolle, who at the time held the post of a sort of chancellor, was exiled from the country. Gustav sent a message to Pope Clement VII requesting the acceptance of a new archbishop selected by Gustav himself: Johannes Magnus.

The Pope sent back his decision demanding that unlawful expulsion of Archbishop Gustav Trolle be rescinded, and that the archbishop be reinstated. Here Sweden's remote geographical location proved to have a marked impact – for the former Archbishop had been allied with the Danish king, or at least was considered to have been so allied in contemporary Stockholm, and to reinstate him would be close to impossible for Gustav.

The king let the Pope know the impossibility of the request, and the possible results if the Pope persisted, but – for better or worse – the Pope did persist, and refused to accept the king's suggestions of archbishops. At the time, incidentally and for different reasons, there were also four other unoccupied bishop's seats, where the king made suggestions to the Pope about candidates, but the Pope only accepted one of the candidates. Because the Pope refused to budge on the issue of Gustav Trolle, the king, influenced by Lutheran scholar Olaus Petri, in 1531 took it upon himself to appoint yet another archbishop, namely the brother of Olaus, Laurentius Petri. With this royal act, the Pope lost any influence over the Swedish Church.

Introduction of Lutheranism.

In the 1520s, the Petri brothers led a campaign for the introduction of Lutheranism. The decade saw many events which can be seen as gradual introductions of Protestantism, for instance the marriage of Olaus Petri – a consecrated priest – and several texts published by him, advocating Lutheran dogmas. A translation of the New Testament had also been published in 1526. After the reformation, a full translation was published in 1540–41, called the Gustav Vasa Bible.

Further reign

Gustav encountered resistance from some areas of the country. People from Dalarna rebelled three times in the first ten years of Gustav's reign, as they considered the king to have been too harsh on everyone he perceived as a supporter of the Danish, and as they resented his introduction of Protestantism. Many of those who had helped Gustav in his war against the Danes became involved in these rebellions and paid for this, several of them with their lives.

Peasants in Småland rebelled in 1542, fuelled by grievances over taxes, church reform and confiscation of church bells and vestments. For several months this uprising caused Gustav severe difficulties in the dense forests.

The king sent a letter

The king sent a letter to the people of the province of Dalarna, requesting that they should circulate letters to every Swedish province, stating their support for the king with their troops, and urging every other province to do the same. Gustav got his troops, with whose help – and, not least, with paid German mercenaries – he managed to defeat the rebels in the spring of 1543.

Nils Dacke

The leader of the rebels, Nils Dacke, has traditionally been seen as a traitor to Sweden. His own letters and proclamations to fellow peasants focused on the suppression of Roman Catholic customs of piety, the King's requisitions of church bells and church plate to be smelted down for money and the general discontent with Gustav's autocratic measures, and the King's letters indicate that Dacke had considerable military success for several months.

Difficulties with the continuation of the Church also troubled Gustav Vasa. The 1540s saw him imposing death sentences upon both the Petri brothers, as well as his former chancellor Laurentius Andreae. All of them were however granted amnesty, after spending several months in jail. In 1554–1557, he waged an inconclusive war against Ivan the Terrible of Russia.

End of reign

In the late 1550s, Gustav's health declined. When his grave was opened in 1945, an examination of his corpse revealed that he had suffered chronic infections of a leg and in his jaw.

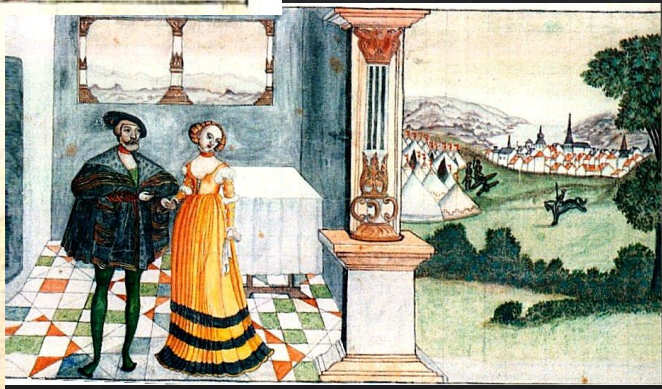
He gave a so-called "last speech" in 1560 to the chancellors, his children and other noblemen, whereby he encouraged them to remain united. On 29 September 1560, Gustav died and was buried (together with three of his wives, while only two are engraved) in the Cathedral of Uppsala.

Legacy

Gustav's legacy has been disputed. In 19th-century Swedish history a folklore developed wherein Gustav was supposed to have had all kinds of adventures when he liberated Sweden from the Danes. Today most of these stories are considered to have no other foundation than legend and skilful propaganda by Gustav himself during his time. One such story states he was staying at a close friend's farm to rest for one day during his escape from the Danish army.

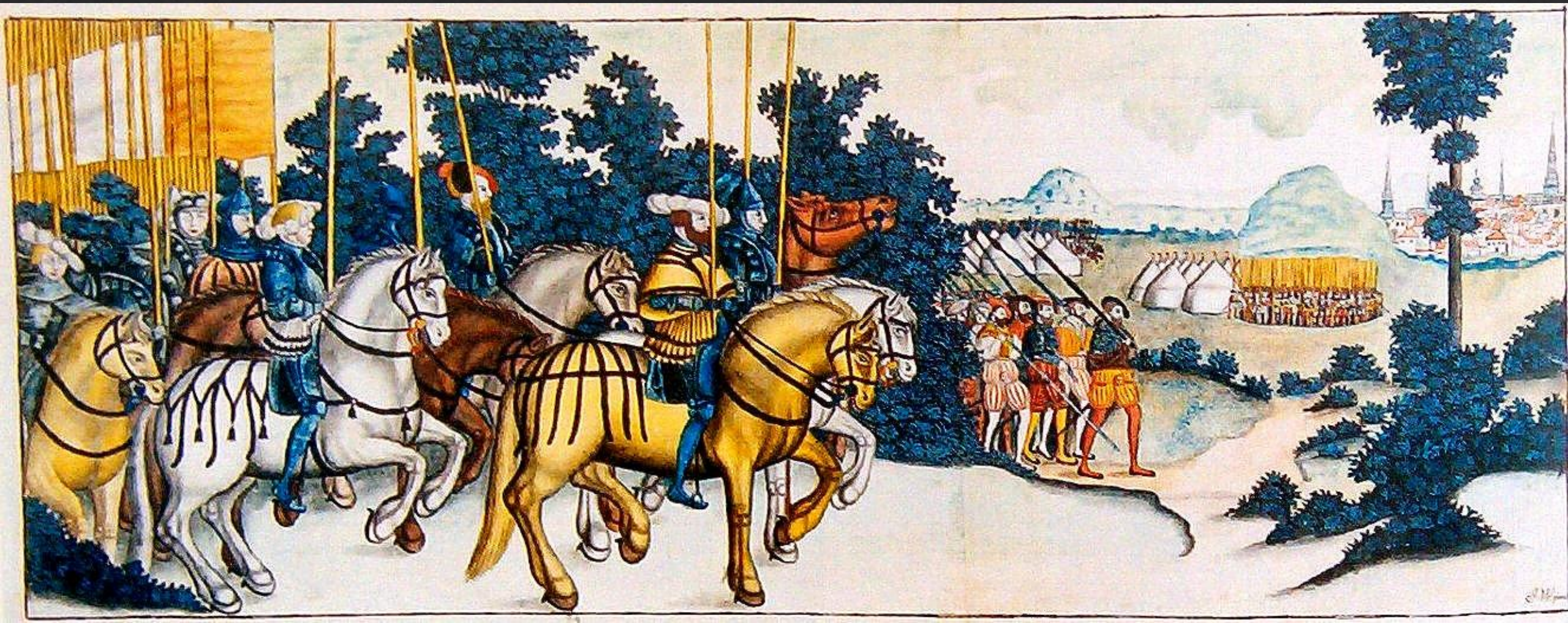
The memory of Gustav has been honored greatly, resulting in embroidered history books, commemorative coins, and the annual ski event Vasaloppet (the largest ski event in the world with 15,000 participants). The city of Vaasa in Finland was named after the royal house of Vasa in 1606. 18th century playwrights and librettists used his biography as the source for some of their works, including the 1739 Gustavus Vasa by Henry Brooke (the first play banned under the Licensing Act 1737, due to Robert Walpole's belief that the play's villain was a proxy for himself) and the 1770 Gustavo primo re di Svezia. The name Gustavus Vasa was also given to Olaudah Equiano, a prominent African ex-slave living in Britain and involved in the struggle to abolish slavery.

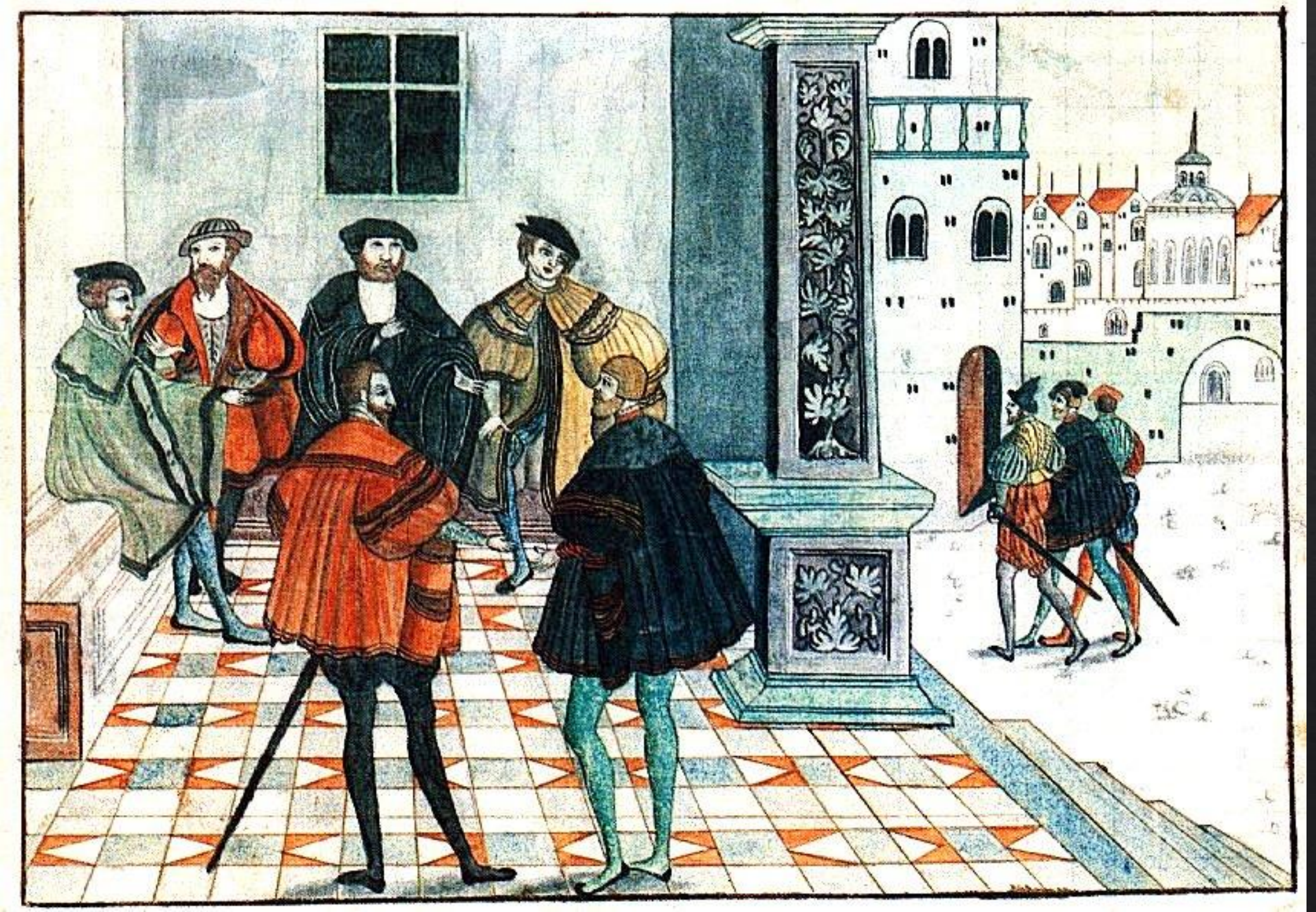
Year 1527, Inside and outside Västerås



Year 1525, Inside Stockholm

Year 1542, the Dacke uprising





Year 1541, in Brömsebro with Christian III of Denmark